

August 22, 2005

Heart to Heart

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Are We Getting Enough Sleep?

“Most American adults sleep poorly,” according to a study of the National Sleep Foundation on 1506 adults which was reported in Washington by the Associated Press. The findings are obviously applicable to most of us in general.

Lack of sleep translates to lesser mental acuity and concentration, poorer health, greater driving hazards, reduced productivity, and diminished sex drive.

Sleep experts recommend a minimum of 7 to 9 hours of sleep in 24 hours. The survey showed that adults sleep an average of 6.9 hours a night. The few minutes to 3 hours of sleep deprivation is enough to cause problems.

Seventy-five percent of adults reported they frequently have difficulty in sleeping, like problem in initiating sleep, waking up often during the night, and/or snoring, waking up too early, and feeling unrefreshed and tired. Many also stated that they ignored the problem, and some do not even think they actually have any sleep deficit. Only about 50% of those surveyed stated they were able to sleep well most of the time. Twenty five percent thought their sleep problem had adverse effects on their daily routines.

Richard Gelula, the Chief Executive Officer of the Sleep Foundation, said there’s a link between sleep and quality of life. “People who sleep well, in general, are happier and healthier,” said Gelula. “But when sleep is poor or inadequate, people feel tired or fatigued, their social and intimate relationship suffer, work productivity is negatively affected, and they make our roads more dangerous by driving while sleepy and less alert.”

Obviously, the quality of sleep, besides the number of hours, is very important. Chris Drake, senior scientist at the Henry Ford Sleep Center in Detroit and co-chair of the 2005 poll task force, stated that some of the nation’s sleep habits can be attributed to an “always-on-the-go society.”

The commercial world of today stretches business to 24 hours a day, with 24-hour pharmacy, restaurants, casinos, supermarkets, etc., so people tend to stay up late, watch late night shows on television, surfing the web on the internet, etc. All these reduce people’s time to sleep. And some people even need more than 9 hours of sleep to feel refreshed and rested.

This study also showed (1) Sixty percent of adult stated they have driven a vehicle while drowsy from lack of sleep the past year; and 4 in 10 reported they have had an accident or near accident because of tiredness or falling asleep at the wheel. (2) Seventy five percent claims their partner has a sleep problem, snoring as the most common complaint. (3) Four out of ten of those surveyed reported lack of sleep adversely affected their sexual relationship, having lost interest in sex, having poorer performance or having sex less often. (4) Seventy percent claimed that their physician never asked them about their sleep.

The recommendations of the National Sleep Foundation and experts in the field are abstinence from any stimulant, coffee and alcohol before bedtime, and to seek medical help if they think they are having sleep problem and/or snoring, or not getting enough rest at night.

Lack of sleep reduces the normal “recharging time of our body battery, our energy source” causing a chain of reactions in our physiology and body chemistry. This “lo-bat” condition leads to physical and mental stresses to our system. All these alter the normal homeostasis (internal balance) within us, weakening our immune system, and increasing our risk of developing metabolic diseases, hypertension (high blood pressure), stroke and heart attack, among others, or aggravating existing illnesses.

The prescription for a healthy lifestyle, for maximal maintenance of good health and disease prevention, besides regular medical check-up, includes the following ingredients: Adequate sleep, rest and relaxation, total abstinence from tobacco, strict moderation in alcohol intake (a glass or two of red wine with dinner is great), daily exercises (like brisk walking), low-fat, low-cholesterol, low-carb, high-fiber diet (vegetables, fruits, grains, nuts, etc), and, equally important, having a happy and positive attitude in life.

The main objective of this column is to educate and inspire people live a healthier lifestyle to prevent illnesses and disabilities, and achieve a happier and more productive life. Any diagnosis, recommendation or treatment in our article are general medical information and not intended to be applicable or appropriate for anyone. This column is not a substitute for your physician, who knows your condition well and who is your best ally when it comes to your health.